

If you have a copy of the Scripture, I invite you to turn to Hebrews, Chapter 12. For the week where we celebrate and commemorate Christ's sacrifice on our behalf, Pastor Randy and I thought we'd take a brief break from the book of Acts, but hopefully see how it all does work together. It's all God's Word.

Let me read from Chapter 12, the first three verses. God's Word for us.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

Let's pray together. Our gracious God, we come now to this time where we look into your Word. We pray, Lord, that you, by your Holy Spirit, would open up our eyes clearly and cause our hearts to be receptive places and our minds to be renewed as your truth goes forth. I pray that you'd bless the encounter that we have with your Word today. Bless the preacher and bless those who hear. Lord, all for your glory, all for your glory. And in the name of Jesus Christ we ask it of you. Amen. Amen.

Maybe you're familiar with the 1989 movie, "The Dead Poets Society." Robin Williams plays an English teacher at a 1950's all-male boarding school. His name is Mr. Keating---pretty appropriate, there, right? There's a memorable scene, the *carpe diem* scene in the beginning of the film, where Mr. Keating comes into the classroom of his boys and his English literature class, and he takes them on a little field trip down the hallway to the wall of trophies, where you see all the trophies and awards and accolades that the students who have preceded his current crop of students had received. There in the photographs of the leather-clad football helmet stars and all of the other things in the trophy case, Mr. Keating invites and encourages his students to lean forward as if to somehow hear a word of instruction, a word of encouragement, from those who had gone before. And as the boys lean in close to the trophy case, the Robin Williams character comes behind them. *Carpe.....diem*. Right? *Carpe diem*, seize the day, "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may," you know. Life is short. These who have preceded you now speak to you through this trophy case and invite you to do what you are supposed to do. Right? That's his message. And as the movie goes along we see his message is for them to become liberal and freethinkers and to buck the system. No movie review here, but it's a pretty good treatment of that thought.

In a very similar way, although distinct, the writer of Hebrews is doing the same thing for his readers and for us in turn, today. He's pointing to Chapter 11, that great Hall of Faith---all of those who have walked with our great God before us. Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and all ordinary men and women like you and me who have by faith done incredible things. Ordinary people doing extraordinary things---keeping the faith. And the writer of Hebrews knows that the people who are reading this sermonic letter that he's given to them, and the people that all through the ages would experience the same world that they experienced, need this word of encouragement.

He says, therefore, in view of such a great cloud of witnesses who testified to our faithful God, who preserves the faith of those who love him---in view of that great cloud of witnesses, let us run the race before us with endurance. The word that's translated here 'race' is actually the Greek word *agon*. It's where we get the English word 'agony.' It's very purposeful here. This life we live is agonizing. It's torturous. It's filled with pain. It's exhausting at times. And that's what the writer is aware of, because he lives it. He says, let us. So because we---he's in the midst of it with them.

It's very appropriate to speculate that some of the recipients of this letter could have a direct tie to the Jewish converts that we've read about the last several weeks in the book of Acts---all of those 3000 souls that were added to the church after Peter preached that first sermon on the day of Pentecost, and then others, up to 5000 in number, being added to the church daily---believing that Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the historical literal figure who had walked the same planet that they did, was the Messiah, the living Son of God who took on flesh, and who has paid the price to atone for sins. What started out with great enthusiasm for the newfound faith, marked with powerful miracles demonstrated and performed by the hands of the apostles, was now facing real and constant persecution at the hands of those who hate God and hate the gospel of our God. It was real potential for weariness, even to the point of giving up the faith. And that's who the writer is writing to.

That's what God knows about us even today in 2014 when we come into this facility today to worship him. We are in an agonizing race. This life is filled with exhausting demands, difficulties, and trials, It's tough, taxing. It's not lived out on the mountaintop experience of a weekend retreat. It's is lived out in the day to day daily grind of the mundane. That's where Christianity is lived out. In fact, that's where God gets the most glory, if you think about it, because that's what the picture of walking by faith looks like. We don't walk by these strong feelings or these ever-increasing feelings that we generate with one another. We walk by faith in the midst of hard times and difficult choices.

So the writer of Hebrews employs this image of the race, *agon*. This isn't a walk in the park. It's not a stroll on the beach. It's not a light jog through a rose garden. It's a difficult, demanding, and oftentimes exhausting marathon. It's a long, drawn out course that God has set before us, whereby he grows his people into the image of Christ Jesus himself. And I run into this when we talk about the reality of this world. We want it to be something else. Please, let it be something else. Not this hard, torturous, agonizing race that's being described all through the pages of Scripture.

We think about Princess Buttercup in the movie "The Princess Bride," when she's reciting all of the pain and torture of her life to that point to the Man in Black, who's really Westley (spoiler alert). She says, 'You mock my pain!' and he returns that line, and it's often misquoted in our household, 'Life is pain, Highness, and anyone who says different is selling something.' What we experience in this life is hard, and God knows it better than we do. That's why he has given to us his Word. We pretend it's not hard, or we cover with stuff that makes it less hard, but it's hard. And God knows it. The race is hard and we need endurance. The call is to endurance. Endurance is that Greek word that carries the idea of pressing forward, never giving up, unrelenting---even when every fiber of our being wants to lay down and give it up, to stop, to just be done with it.

Is it worth it? The ridicule of friends and family, the tough choices that cause your lifestyle to be different than all those in your cul-de-sac. Is it worth it? The exhaustion of living in a frame that is frail and subject to sickness and illness and death. Is it worth it? This is a recurring theme for the writer of the letter to the Hebrews. In Chapter 10 he reminds the readers that when they came to faith, they endured hardship, sometimes public reproach and affliction. They joyfully accepted the plundering of their property. We saw this in the book of Acts. Those who had been lavished with grace were willing to sell what they had and distribute it among them, the other brothers and sisters. It wasn't a requirement of the church to sell everything. It's not a requirement of the government---you know, we can't take that away from Acts, Chapter 2. But what they did was show that they saw the kingdom was of another world, and they were willing to use these resources in ways that we could imagine were far-reaching.

In Hebrews 10:36 God says through his inspired writer these words: "For you have need of endurance, (I have need of endurance...), so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For, 'Yet

a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.' But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but we are of those who have faith and preserve their souls." From Hebrews 10.

So how do we run with endurance? We have a need for endurance, but has God given us anything in these three verses that we can cling to? Principles, maybe, that we can adhere to; promises, possibly, that we can rest in, hoping and praying that the Holy Spirit will enable us to believe and to preserve our faith to the end of our days. I think they're here. Yes! And it's for all of us. I know that Pastor Randy and I have talked about this multiple times since he's come to Columbia. The person that stands here doesn't stand with a finger saying, 'You, you, you! Do this, do that!' We stand here and say 'Us. We. We're in this together.' That's what the writer of this letter does. Since we have such a great a cloud of witnesses, let us run the race with endurance. It's a joint effort, always pointing one another to the reality of a fallen world and the faithfulness of a faithful God. Amen?

So in Chapter 11 he recalls for us those who witnessed the faith of God---all of those names. Noah believing God for deliverance from the destruction of the world to come. Abraham believing God to keep his promises when all seemed like there is no way that promise could be fulfilled. Sarah is named in that Hall of Faith, who believed God would deliver to her a son, the child of the promise. By faith Moses chose to be mistreated with the people of God rather than enjoy the temporary pleasures of Pharaoh's palace. And on and on and on the list goes. Men and women like you and me. Men and women who 'conquered kingdoms,' it says, 'enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped from the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness by faith.' They suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment, stoning, even to the point of death and martyrdom. They may have been different people, in different settings, in different cultures, and they looked different from us, but they served the same God that we do. They served and worshiped and adored the same God that we do---the God who is the same yesterday, today, and forevermore.

And that's what the writer is calling our attention to. Come, look at their faith. Look at who they testify to. He is the God who is at work in you. So, three principles, if you will, three action steps, three points from the Scriptures, that God, I believe, needs my heart to hear, and I trust for you as well.

The first thing he says is reject anything and everything that threatens your endurance in this race. Reject anything and everything that threatens your endurance in the agonizing course of life that we have in this fallen world. Therefore, he says, with this great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and run with endurance the race set before us. Maybe you've seen those commercials of the athletes for Gatorade. I think there's one with RG3 (any Redskins fans...don't raise your hands) RG3's got that personal parachute strapped to a harness. It's like a fifteen, sixteen foot parachute behind him, and he's sprinting down the field, you know, and this thing is unfurled, it's dragging on him. And the principle---I guess, because I've ever been harnessed to a personal parachute---but the principle is when you unharness that thing, when you sprint, you fly down the field. You see the people on the trail every so often with the ankle weights on, helping to build up that---whatever---so when they strip the ankle weights off, man, they're faster. That's the point. That's the picture.

These are things that are not necessarily evil, he's saying, but they're not helpful to the race. And I've got to be honest, there are two distinct things here. One is the weight that's not necessarily evil, but not helpful to the race, and the other is sin. We kind of get sin, but let's look at the first thing, the weight. I've got to be honest, this is the difficult part of sermon preparation for me this week. It's difficult because sin, I get. Black and white. God's Word. I know what I'm supposed to do. At least I know what I'm supposed to do, whether or not I do it, or am able to achieve. Bu this one---this is where we need the Holy Spirit to help encourage our hearts.

I like TV. I use social media. I have hobbies. I have past-times and sports that I enjoy and endeavors that interest me outside the strict parameters of church life. In fact, some of those things I even do to make and maintain friendships with people who are, at least right now, not believers in Jesus Christ. There's a lot of things that are not necessarily evil. But we have to ask the question: Are they helpful? Because each and every one of those things that I mentioned, albeit not inherently evil, has the potential to be a weight that bogs down my ability to run the race that God has set before me.

Now, I have to let you make your own list, because that's for you and the Holy Spirit to work out. That's my list, or at least that's a part of my list. To evaluate, to always be asking, Lord, is this helpful to my race? Is this a hindrance? Is my obsessiveness with this one particular thing, is this too much? Lay it aside. Lay it aside. With each and every one of those things we run the real risk of distractions that draw away our best thinking and the firstfruits of our energy. Where we should be focusing and rejoicing in him, we're focusing and rejoicing in something else. And see how that's the tough part of the sermon prep? Maybe it's a tough part of the sermon hearing, as well.

But the writer of Hebrews also says lay those weights aside, but also: "...and the sin which clings so closely." The picture here, the word picture here is that which entangles, that which is closely binding. When the first century runners would run, they wouldn't wear those long robes. They would gird up their loins, or they would strip off the robe altogether. I know there was a 10K race over here that Clyde's sponsored this morning---I believe, right? Can you imagine? Picture the scene at the starting line for that race, all the runners ready to go. They've got the lightest material on, they've got the finish line in view, and there's a host of volunteers with a whole stack of long burlap sacks. And in order to start the race, you have to put on a burlap sack. You have to pull it up around your legs, and then...Pow!...the starting gun goes off. Can you picture anyone wanting to participate in that race? Well, think about it. The ones that foolishly do participate, they're face-planting in the first twenty feet! Maybe they get thirty feet, maybe forty if they're really good at the bunny hop. But nobody runs a race with a burlap sack clinging tightly to both legs.

And yet, apparently, that's our natural tendency. I'm going to run the race that you've set before me, Lord, I'm going to walk the walk of faith---but I'm going to keep a hold of sin, and I'm going to make sure that I enjoy it. And we face-plant all up and down the straight and narrow path. That's an image that I think we have to let burn into our brain. And the Scriptures say lay aside the weights that aren't necessarily evil, but they're maybe not helpful, and the sin that clings so closely. Put it all aside and run the race. Run the race.

When you entered the service today, you entered the battlefield. When you leave the service today, you enter the battlefield. You open up your TV or sit in a dark movie theater or open up a book or magazine---you enter the battlefield. The battlefield is for your belief it's for your mind, it's for your heart, it's for what fills your mind, it's for what your heart worships. The world, our flesh, and the enemy, Satan are constantly waging war for our minds and our hearts. What will win out? We know the mutually exclusive relationship between lies and the truth, between doubt and belief, between fear and faith, between control that we wrest away from God and sweet surrender to his sovereign will. And that's the battleground. That's what's going on. Every time that we listen to a sermon based on God's Word we're engaged in the battle. Every time that your family opens up the Bible to read aloud, you're engaged in that battle. Every time your home fellowship group sits down to seriously study the Scriptures, you're engaged in that battle. Because you're looking at Christ.

That's what he goes on to say. You may be thinking, hey, reject anything and everything that hinders my race of faith---that's hard to do. God knows that. Man, he knows it better than we do. He knows how hard it is. That's why this Scripture today does not say: Just do it! Get on with it! Live faithful lives! It's about time! It says run the race of endurance, looking to Jesus. If you want to strengthen your faith, you don't look at your

faith, you look at the object of your faith. You look at what makes your faith real. You look at what makes your faith possible. You look at the founder and the perfecter of your faith. You look at Jesus. It says, '....looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith...'

Now this makes perfect sense, doesn't it? This is where the Scriptures are just like...this is so logical. If I'm going to grow in my understanding of Christ, then I'd better be looking at Christ and not me. The word picture here, actually in the Greek, is that our focus would be on the one thing and not allow the distractions to draw our attention away. Picture the scene of a couple, they're at a romantic setting in a restaurant. He had flowers delivered to the table in advance. There's a candle lit. The server who's coming to the table, he can't get an order from them, because they haven't even looked at the menu. Their eyes are only for the other. They're not doing the phone thing, they're not looking around at other people to see what they're wearing. They're focused on the one that they love. That's what they wanted to enjoy that evening when they went out, and they are going to do it. That's the picture here. Focus. So we focus on Jesus.

It's interesting that the Scriptures here employ 'Jesus.' The writer of Hebrews could have said, 'Looking to the eternal Son of God who was part of creation, who was the eternal Word, looking to the Son of God who has risen from the dead and is highly exalted.' But he says, 'Looking to Jesus.' It's as if what he's doing, (I believe, probably, definitely he's doing this), is saying this is a person. Surely, surely, he is the second person of the Godhead, the triune God, the eternal, self-existent God. But this is Jesus, who took on flesh. He is fully human. He is the only one who is capable of making the payment for our sin, because he was the sinless one. And even more than that, he's accomplished through his life and his death and his resurrection the thing that completely pleases God, in that everything he did, whether external or internal to him, glorified God, without exception. He worshiped the Lord his God with all his heart, all of his mind, all of his soul, and all of his strength---all of the time!

He's done that righteous work for us who are unrighteous. His work was to do the will of the Father in heaven, he said. He had complete trust in the Father's plan of redemption. He trusted the Father through times of rejection and scorn. He trusted the Father when he was misunderstood and not received by his own people. He submitted himself to the Father's will, regardless of the path that that would take him---up the hill to the cross and Golgotha, where he would be nailed, naked, in front of a mocking crowd who shouted all manner of insults, not just to him, but to his God. *He claims to serve God, why doesn't God come and save him?* And he trusted the Father completely in the midst of every adversity that we read about and every adversity that we can't even possibly begin to imagine he encountered. And he's the founder of our faith. That's the faith that Jesus had, the faith that he originated. He's the originator of our faith, and, it says, he's the perfecter. And he's the one who completes our faith. He will see us through to that day. That's what Paul was so rejoicing about when he wrote to the Philippians. He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it unto the day of Christ Jesus. So he is the originator of our faith. He's the one who lived a perfect life, completely trusting God for everything, in every adversity, in every temptation, and never once sinned. And he is the one who perfects our faith. He brings it to fullness. He'll see us through.

When he took on the mission to come to earth and accomplish the reconciliation between a holy God and sinful people, he knew what it would cost him. He knew that a substitutionary sacrifice of that sort was going to be very costly, but he also knew---and that's what the Scriptures say---he knew that it was going to display, in all of its splendor, the wisdom of the only wise God. He knew that it would bring glory to God. That's the joy set before him. Jesus knew that the justice of God was going to be highly esteemed, that the righteousness of God was going to be highly exalted, that the mercy of God was going to be lavished upon those who did not deserve mercy, that the grace of God was going to be expended on those who were his enemies, and that the love of God was going to be demonstrated to those who were weak and powerless. Jesus, for the joy set before him, the joy of knowing that God will be vindicated completely, with every knee bowed, with every

tongue confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father---that's the joy set before him: God would be fully known and glorified.

That brings Jesus unmitigated joy, to accomplish the Father's plan of redemption, which involved rising from the dead and returning to the Father, to the right hand of the throne. That certainly was within the joy set before him. He knew that death would not hold him. He trusted the plan of God. He knew that, because although that was a plan unimagined by man before the fall in the garden, it was the plan of God all along before the foundation of the world. According to John 17:24, the love between the Father and the Son was already in place before the foundation of the world. According to Ephesians 1:4, all of those who were chosen in him to be holy and blameless before him, were chosen before the foundation of the world. According to 1 Peter 1:18-21, the ransom that would shed his blood was foreknown before the foundation of the world. According to Matthew 25:34, the inheritance of the kingdom was prepared for all of Christ's followers before the foundation of the world. According to Revelation 13:8 and Revelation 17:8, the Lamb's book of life, where all the names of God's elect have been written...when? Before the foundation of the world. Jesus' joy was that that would be ultimately revealed for all of the created matter ever.

And he wants his joy to be our joy. Remember in his earthly ministry, Jesus said this in John 15: These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and your joy may be full or complete, brought to maturity. He wants us to revel in the glory of God, as well. Well, isn't that the purpose for which we were made in the beginning? Our first catechism question: What is the chief end of man? What's the primary purpose of man? It's to glorify God and enjoy him forever. It's why the Psalms are filled with commands: Rejoice! It's why Paul also said to the Philippians could say: Rejoice! Again I say, rejoice! Rejoice in what? Rejoice in Jesus, looking to Jesus, looking to the founder and the perfecter of your faith.

Looking to the one, who for the joy set before him, to accomplish that joy in us, had to do at least two things. The Scriptures say this: that he endured the cross, and he despised the shame. Our sins require a penalty. Please don't leave the building today without getting at least that truth. The warning of the Word of God is this, that our sins require a payment. My sins require a payment, your sins require a payment. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin. Either we make the payment ourselves, in all eternity incurring the wrath of God, or we believe in the one who endured the cross and had the wrath of God poured out on him for us, on our behalf, in our place. He has become a propitiation, the Scriptures talk about. He's appeased the angry wrath of the Deity, because he's absorbed the wrath of God for our sin. God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us. He endured the cross, because of our sin, not because of his sin. He endured the cross and everything that came with it: the physical pain, the torture, yes, the mocking---everything that led up to the cross---the misunderstanding, the mockery of a trial. But also even worse, the spiritual forsaking of the Father, when he became sin for us. With every stroke that justice made, he saw the joy that was set before him, and he endured. That's the grace of endurance. He endured with that joy set before him. We're called to endure with that same joy set before us---the glory of God. They may laugh at the cubicle next to you because you break out your Scriptures and read during lunch time, but the joy that's set before you endures that laughter and myriad of other persecutions and mockeries.

But it says also that he endured the cross, but he despised the shame, the shame that threaten to undo him. Shame is a powerful weapon. You've probably experienced it. I've experienced it. Whether the internal voice: *How could you have done that?* Or the external voice: *How could you've done that?* The shame that we experience because of our sin. He didn't just put up with it or get through it or do something. He hated it. He scorned it. He hated it with a righteous anger, and he burned against that shame. I think there's something there for us. He despised the shame of being abandoned by his disciples. That's a lonely place to be, to be rejected by your friends. He was rejected by the leaders of the religion that he himself established, and he despised that shame, he hated it, he scorned it.

This is something that we should probably appreciate. He said this is wrong! This should not be! It's not right this way, and I hate this! He despised the shame. He despised the shame of hearing the humiliation and the insults against God's honor and the mockery and the ridicule. He was crucified and he died and he was buried, despising the shame of all of that.

But on the third day he rose again from the dead, right? And he has been seated now at the throne, seated at the right hand of the throne of God. He originates and completes our faith, as well, so that you and I can endure suffering and shame. We can endure the trials of this life, the agony of this life---living in a fallen world---and not lose heart. Paul spoke to the Corinthian church and he said so we do not lose heart. He's speaking about the walk of faith. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light and momentary affliction of this life is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory, beyond all comparison, as we look not to things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient and temporary, but the things that are unseen, eternal. What Paul was doing is exactly what the writer of Hebrews is doing: Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. That's our walk. That's our hope. That's our focus.

So how do we get there? The third step, if you will, the third principle, the third point. Receive the prescription for persevering faith found in the originator and the perfecter, the author and finisher of our faith. There is an ailment that is very close at hand. The ailment that the Scriptures talk about is to grow weary and faint-hearted. And the ultimate ailment result is to give up the faith. The writer of Hebrews to this point has encouraged and admonished his readers to stand firm, to hold fast, to not give up the confession that they have begun with. It's for us as well. And how do we do that? What's the prescription? What's the key? How do we get there?

He says consider him. Consider Christ. Just like in verse 2, looking to Jesus---that's a phrase talking about our sight, our focus---this is a different Greek word. And it means: on that which you focus, analyze intently. It's like when you get one of those box things to put together, you get the instructions in five different languages and you finally find the one that you can read. And you know that there's only so many bolts and so many washers and so many things, and you study that instruction thing, because if you bang one of those things into a piece of wood and it wasn't supposed to be there, it's all messed up. So you analyze intently. Well, if we walk through life and we don't consider Christ, analyzing intently him and his work for us, then the endurance of our race is very much threatened.

He says 'Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself.' Look at the suffering of Christ on your behalf, is basically what he's saying Look at the suffering of Christ on your behalf. We have a great week before us, this week between Palm Sunday and Easter. Many families do personal challenges: Let's read through the gospel of John, or let's read the last week of Jesus in each of the four gospels, or let's pick up one of those helpful things like John Piper's book, you know, *Why Did Jesus Have to Die...whatever...or something*. But a lot of people take this week and they consider Christ intently. And I want to encourage you to do that. I want to encourage these seven Floras here to help me encourage them, as they encourage me to do that, so we don't lose sight.

This Thursday we have a special service set up here, right here in this room, 7 p.m., for about an hour. We're going to observe the Lord's Supper and see the self-sacrificing love of Christ where he instituted that supper for us on the night in which he was betrayed. And then on Friday night we have another special service for about an hour, at seven o'clock, to see Christ on the cross, given as a sacrifice for sinners like us. And then next Sunday---I think we've come to recognize that this is the pattern of the Christian church---every Sunday we celebrate the resurrection. But there's that one day where all of Christendom---and even the rest of the world

has to take note at some point, whether or not they are hostile to the fact or not---that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, or at least that's what we say we believe. We celebrate and we consider Christ.

And we need this concentrated focus on Christ. We need it all the time, Amen? This week and other weeks and all of our lives, because life is like this up and down thing. It ebbs and flows. Sometimes it just seems like everything is hitting on all eight cylinders, and sometimes it just doesn't start. There's a helpful illustration that I came across by Christian counselor David Powlison. Let me see if it's helpful for you as well. He describes the pattern of Christian growth---our growth in grace---as a yo-yo. Up and down, the ebb and flow. Sometimes it's just really engaged, and sometimes you're wondering if you're even on the journey with Jesus at all. It seems like a yo-yo from our perspective. And if we only keep our attention on us and that yo-yo, it could really be debilitating. It's up and it's down, it's ebbing and flowing, it's hot and cold. Yet Powlison goes on in this illustration to talk about it's a yo-yo in the hands of the sovereign Lord who is walking up a flight of stairs. So there's a forward and upward progression. He's always moving upward toward the completion of our faith---always. And the picture there is that even in the ebbs and the flows, we're still with him, onward progressing.

That to me is the beauty of what it means to live by faith in this agonizing race that we're in. Consider Christ. Consider the sovereign God. Consider the one who before the foundation of the world completed your destiny in Christ---and endure and follow and lay off all those weights and put aside that sin that clings so closely. Ever upward, ever onward, toward the day of completion. Because one day---and I'll just pull from Powlison's illustration here---one day that yo-yo string is going to recede into the loving, everlasting arms of our Savior, and we're going to be with him face-to-face, out of the presence of sin, no more anything agony---all bliss, all joy, no tear, no pain, no death---with him forever and ever. Amen.

Let me close with a verse and a chorus from a favorite hymn of mine. O soul, are you weary and troubled? No light in the darkness you see? There's light for a look at the Savior, and life more abundant and free! Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

Let's pray together. Thank you, gracious God, for preserving this Word for these many centuries and for giving us an opportunity to have this appointment with your Spirit today. Lord, please be at work. Help us. We don't want to just keep keeping on, we want to endure with the joy set before Christ, with Jesus' joy. Lord, fill us with a passion to see you glorified above all things. And Lord, please, enable us to discern and think through those weights that are not so helpful and to lay them aside, and to recognize the sin that clings so closely and Lord, to repent, to forsake it, to trust you again. And Lord, please, to see you clearly as the founder and the perfecter of the faith. And strengthen us even, even as we praise and worship you now. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.